

Women who chew betel quids are putting themselves at risk of heart disease. A population study in Taiwan found the prevalence of use was higher in men than women (31% v 2.4%), but there was no significant difference in the prevalence of heart disease between the sexes (*American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2007;85:1229-35, www.ajcn.org). The daily rate of betel use was independently associated with prevalence of heart disease, consumption of 10 quids a day being associated with an odds ratio of 1.37 in women (95% CI 1.1 to 1.6, $P=0.003$).

Your kitchen worktop may be dirtier than your toilet seat, and your baby's high chair is probably dirtier than the floor it stands on, according to the Hygiene Council's 2007 survey. In fact, the average kitchen surface has about 10 times more bacteria than the toilet seat. A rather disgusting list of statistics reveals that only 3% of British people think the home is a more likely source of infection than public places, and only a third of Brits wash their hands properly after sneezing, handling pets, before eating and handling food, and after using the toilet (www.hygienecouncil.com).

On the basis that magnesium has been suggested as a useful adjunct to postoperative analgesia, researchers randomised 200 adults who were undergoing ambulatory hernia repair or varicose vein surgery under general anaesthesia to receive an intravenous bolus of either magnesium sulphate or saline after anaesthesia was induced. The incidence of postoperative problems was similar in both groups, and magnesium had no impact on postoperative pain or consumption of painkillers (*Anesthesia & Analgesia* 2007;104:1374-9).

Alcohol based gels for hand rubbing improve compliance with hand hygiene and produce better skin condition than do liquid hand rubs, according to a prospective intervention study published online in *Critical Care* (2007;11:R52, doi: 10.1186/cc5906). Instant access, including its availability in healthcare workers' pockets, was the strongest predictor of use.

A study of a large diabetes-free cohort of adults aged 40-60 reveals that the combined intake of fructose and glucose (but not sucrose, lactose, or maltose) in sweetened fruit and soft drinks predicts the risk of type 2 diabetes (*Journal of Nutrition* 2007;137:1447-54, www.jn.nutrition).

A 70 year old woman presented to her general practitioner with a swelling on the anterior chest wall after mitral valve replacement. The general practitioner attempted to aspirate the swelling, but it recurred spontaneously. She was referred for further investigations, which showed that the swelling communicated with the branches of the right internal mammary artery. She was treated with selective embolisation and subsequent surgical evacuation.

Pseudoaneurysms are not uncommon after wiring of the sternum, which is the most popular method of closing sternotomy wounds. They can be embolised or stented, but stenting is considered preferable because it does not interrupt the distal blood supply. They are associated with a high risk of bleeding because of communication with deeper structures.



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org). During a 12 year follow-up, 177 new cases of diabetes were identified from the cohort of 4304 men and women, and the relative risk of developing diabetes in those with the highest combined intake of fructose and glucose, compared with those with the lowest intake, was 1.87 (95% CI 1.19 to 2.93, $P=0.003$).

The Race Equality Foundation has announced a work programme designed to improve the lives of black and minority ethnic users of health and housing services. The foundation is targeting frontline healthcare staff and managers in particular, holding seminars and workshops. It has developed topical *Better Health* briefing papers to address what needs to change. The papers set out key messages for staff written by experts on such topics as racism and health, mental health, racial harassment, and terminal illness. The papers can be accessed at www.raceequalityfoundation.org.uk

The ageing of the population and greater life expectancy mean that more elderly patients are undergoing oesophagectomy for cancer these days. But the effect of age alone on the outcome and survival of surgery is negligible. An Italian study reports that increased expertise and experience and better perioperative care explain the current better outcome in elderly patients. Both short and long term outcome measures in patients aged more than 70 were similar to those in younger patients. Age alone, say the authors, should not be a contradiction to surgery (*Journal of Thoracic and Cardiovascular Surgery* 2007;133:1186-92).

Being single in Japan comes with a health warning, but few studies have actually teased out the impact of being single, divorced, or widowed. A prospective study of nearly 100 000 Japanese adults aged 40-79 found that, compared with married men and after adjustment for relevant confounding factors, men who had never married had a higher risk of death from heart and lung diseases. Women who had never married had a smaller but still significant risk of death from all causes. Divorced and widowed men had a slightly higher risk of death than married men, but this wasn't seen among women (*BMC Public Health* 2007;7:73).

As yet, there's no recognised prenatal treatment for intrauterine growth restriction (IUGR) although experiments in sheep offer promising leads. Scientists have found that fetal and amniotic supplements with insulin-like growth factor-1 improve the growth rate in fetal sheep with restricted growth, without changing fetal plasma concentrations of the growth factor or of insulin (*Endocrinology* 2007;148:2963-72).

Four new susceptibility genes for breast cancer have been identified (*Nature* 2007, doi: 10.1038/nature05887). BRCA1 and 2, the two genes already identified, account for less than 25% of the familial risk of breast cancer. Most susceptibility genes are involved in DNA repair, but the four newly identified seem to relate more to the control of cell growth or to cell signalling. One of them, FGFR2, is specifically associated with the risk of sporadic postmenopausal breast cancer (*Nature Genetics* 2007, doi: 10.1038/ng2075).